

Creating Your Own Panel Discussion

Creating Your Own Panel Discussion

The one-hour film special *The Debilitator* broadcast on public television in Atlanta (WPBA) in April 2005 included a 30-minute panel discussion with a physician, an actor from the film who himself has diabetes, a diabetes educator/dietitian, a local religious leader, and a behavioral psychologist as discussion moderator. For your community event, you may choose to show the Calvin Dixon story first, and then have your own panel discussion by a panel of local health care providers, community leaders, and others. This format can be very effective.

Here are a few suggestions for creating your own half-hour panel discussion:

1. Think first about your goals for the panel. Is the main goal to raise awareness of diabetes, to begin discussion of the emotional and behavioral aspects of living with diabetes, to inspire community leaders to take action, to encourage people to share more with their families or with their doctors, or to communicate more basic facts about diabetes?
2. Once you have established your primary goal, decide who would be the best people to communicate these objectives. Keep in mind, for example, that, if the topic is emotional support, a panel of medical experts might not be as capable of connecting with people as a person with diabetes would be.
3. Limit the number of people on the panel. Three or four people may be enough. Five people plus a moderator speaking for only 5 minutes each would take up the entire half-hour with no time for questions.
4. If the panel is speaking in front of a live audience, consider requesting that questions be submitted in writing on an index card and then turned in to the moderator to read aloud. This format will minimize disruptive, inappropriate questions (an unfortunate occurrence at some events).
5. You don't need to write a precise script for the panelists, but make sure that the moderator has a preplanned list of questions (at least one per panelist) to be used to begin the discussion. Also make sure that each panel member knows which initial questions will be directed to him or her.
6. Include an "action item" (specific suggestions for what the viewing audience can do right now while they are feeling motivated) so that people know what steps they can take after the panel discussion concludes. Give a toll-free number that they can call for more information (a local call-in line or the NDEP number), give a Web site that they can visit, or at least make the recommendation that people talk with their own health care providers. You are welcome to use the same discussion questions that were used in the panel discussion at the end of the film *The Debilitator*.

7. Don't forget evaluation. Develop a form that you can hand out at the beginning and collect at the end of the session to find out whether people found the session helpful, what actions they are planning to take, what other topics they wish you had addressed, and so forth. This feedback will give you much needed information for planning future events, and it will be of greater interest to your sponsors than simply the number of people who attended or heard the program.